

Forgetful Joxer

by Starway Man

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Summary: Repost, no new text. Joxer gets amnesia, and becomes Aphrodite's priest when a warlord is coming.

Forgetful Joxer

****Date written**:** Sun 25 Oct 1998

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****Disclaimer**:** The creation of this fiction is a result of the fact that I have way too much time on my hands on a Saturday night. All X-WP characters belong to Universal and Renaissance Pictures, no infringement of copyright is intended, yadda yadda yadda. No profit will be earned, as a result of this work (like that needed to be said).

****Classification**:** Adventure / Crossover

****Warnings**:** First attempt at fan fiction, that should be warning enough.

****Classification**:** Hercules/Xena Crossover

****Summary**:** Joxer, suffering from amnesia, becomes Aphrodite's priest when she finds him on the road. Eventually reunited with Gabrielle and Xena, he finds himself tangling with an invading warlord who is under the orders of Ares. Hercules, Iolaus, Autolycus and Jett are in this one too.

****Rating**:** PG-13 (some violence, but no more than what you see on the show)

****Title**:** Forgetful Joxer

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><p>The temple was a complete mess. The statues were smashed, and all over the walls graffiti was scribbled. In a glitter of sparkling light, Aphrodite the Greek Goddess of Love appeared. She was absolutely furious.<p>

"Not again!" she shouted. "This makes it the second time in three months those little vandals have broken in here! I ought to..."

Just then Ares, the Greek God of War appeared in a burst of multicoloured light. He seemed completely and thoroughly amused. "My my. Again? You and your temples certainly seem to attract the riff-raff. Now if anyone had dared do this in one of MY temples..."

Aphrodite cut him off, still in a bad mood. "What do you want anyway?"

Ares smiled. "I've got a little proposition for you, if you're interested."

Aphrodite glared at him. "Forget it. I remember what happened the last time I listened to you when something like this took place. I still can't believe how much trouble that wench Gabrielle can cause even without trying..."

Ares replied smoothly, "This time it'll be different. I'll supply someone to take care of your temple, if you promise not to interfere with any...other business he may do for me. I help you, you help me. What do you say?"

Aphrodite stared at him, still unconvinced. "Why should I trust you?"

Ares shrugged, and gestured, walking around. "What have you got to lose? Apart from this of course..."

Aphrodite looked straight back at him. It was obvious he was plotting something, but she had no idea what. She shrugged herself. "Have you got someone in mind?"

Ares grinned, an unpleasant sight. "I think I know just the mortal..."

* * *

><p>Some time later, a lone figure was walking down a grassy road in the countryside. His armour clanked, and he wore a ridiculous helmet. However, he seemed not to mind this, and was even singing happily to himself as he walked along:<p>

_ "Joxer the Mighty, _

_ He roams through the countryside, _

_ Never needs a place to hide... "_

Just then Ares appeared right in front of him. The man Joxer jumped back, looking scared. "Uh, Ares. What are you doing here?"

Ares didn't reply at once. He sniffed, and started walking around him

in a circle. "Look at you," he said disdainfully. "You're the son of one of the best warriors that ever fought for me? What went wrong with you?"

"Nothing," replied Joxer. "Xena and Gabrielle helped me realise that the strength of a warrior lies in his heart, not in how many people he kills."

Ares laughed, as a snort. "Ha! Rubbish. Listen up. As warriors your entire family serves me, even you, the misguided idiot. That's why I've got a job for you."

Joxer looked at him. Eventually he said, "No."

Ares was amazed. "Are you actually refusing me?"

Joxer replied nervously, "Yeah, I, uh, guess so."

Ares started pacing again. "Do you understand what I'm offering here? Once you accept, you'll be transformed into a real fighter, one that will have true respect at last. Especially from that irritating little blonde."

Joxer stared at him. "You know about that, how I really feel about Gabrielle?"

Ares grew impatient. "I'm a god you fool! Of course I know. You've got one last chance to accept my offer."

Joxer shook his head. "I don't know what you're planning Ares, but I'm sure it's nothing good. If I help you she'll lose any respect for me, and so will Xena you know."

Ares grew mad. "Don't mention Xena to me, you moron!"

Joxer permitted himself a small smile. "I didn't know you were so touchy about her. I mean, after the way she helped you regain your godhood and all..."

This was too much, and Ares was blind with fury. Lightning sprung from his hand, knocking Joxer off his feet and back ten paces. He landed flat on his back, completely unconscious. Ares disappeared, and reappeared next to the body. "Damn it, I wanted you to do this willingly, the plan would have been much more simple that way. Well, what the hell. I guess I'll just have to change things around a little." He stood over Joxer's body, and spread out his hands. Joxer glowed, and convulsed, with a light leaving his body and disappearing into the air.

"Excellent!" said Ares, triumphantly, just before he vanished.

* * *

><p>A few hours later, Joxer groaned, woke and got up. He looked around in great confusion.<p>

Just then Aphrodite appeared, and grinned at him. "Hello sweetcheeks."

Joxer was still confused. "Who are you?" he said.

Aphrodite stopped smiling, and looked at him carefully. "Don't you know who I am?"

Joxer replied, "No. I don't even know who I am."

Aphrodite started walking around him, much like Ares had done. Joxer stared back at her, his expression still puzzled. Aphrodite knew he wasn't that good an actor, and that he wasn't faking it. 'Ares must have done this,' she thought to herself. 'I wonder why? This wasn't part of his plan.' She shrugged. 'What the hell. Finder's keepers, I always say.'

She straightened up and addressed him calmly. "I'm Aphrodite, the Goddess of Love. And you're the new priest, in my temple at Amphion."

Joxer looked at himself. "I'm a priest? Why can't I remember that - or anything else?"

Aphrodite shrugged again. "I think some other god has given you amnesia, I can see the signs."

Joxer was still not convinced. "Why would someone do that?"

Aphrodite laughed. "You really don't remember much, do you? A god doesn't need a reason to do anything. Maybe they were just bored, or maybe you annoyed them or something."

Joxer looked slightly sick. "Can't you just undo it?" he said hopefully.

Aphrodite laughed even more. "Don't be silly. One god can't undo the work of another just like that, you know."

Joxer looked crestfallen. "Oh. Uh, what's my name by the way?"

Aphrodite was momentarily panicked. "Your name? Uh, the old or the new one?"

Joxer looked confused again. "New name?"

By now, Aphrodite had already started to plan ahead. If she told him who he really was, he might meet someone that had known about him, and tell him the truth. This way, she would get to keep her new servant safe from anything in his past that could cause trouble - either for him or for her.

'Besides, it's like I'm doing him a favor,' she thought to herself. 'So few mortals get the chance for a fresh start, and if anyone ever needed it, it's him!'

Aphrodite said to him, "You had a name before you entered my service, but the man who had that name isn't you any more. Anyway, that guy was so - duh! When you get back to the temple, you'll be known as - 'Father'."

* * *

><p>Six months later two women, a blonde and a brunette, were walking along in a different part of the country. The weather was excellent and Xena and Gabrielle were feeling pretty good, and even Xena's horse Argo seemed to be in high spirits. Gabrielle started humming as they trudged along.<p>

Xena stopped, with a shocked expression on her face. "What are you doing?"

Gabrielle turned to look at her, and blinked. Suddenly she realised what Xena meant, and became shocked herself. "By the Gods, don't tell me that actually happened?"

Xena looked at her. "Yes it did. I never thought I'd actually hear you singing Joxer's song, unless you were under some sort of spell again. You're worried about him, aren't you?"

Gabrielle looked away, and didn't answer immediately. Finally she said, "Not exactly. It's just that he continually follows us around, and always eventually catches up. But now it's been months, and no one's seen him. I mean, where could he possibly be?"

Xena tried to comfort her, knowing she cared about their clumsy friend despite what she said. Privately she thought it was a pity Gabrielle could never see how Joxer really felt about her, but that was none of her business. She said, "I know, I miss him too. We'll find him eventually, but first we've got to stop this warlord."

Gabrielle nodded. "Where do you think he's going to strike next?"

Xena replied, "If he keeps going in the same direction, he'll end up in Corinth. But I doubt he'll go there, the army of King Iphicles is too strong for his liking. My bet is, he turns north."

Gabrielle asked, "Where will that take him?"

Xena answered, "The first place will be a town called Amphion."

* * *

><p>At the same time not far away, two men were also walking along in the sunshine. One was the legendary Hercules, tall and lanky, with shoulder-length dark hair. The other was Iolaus, who was short and wiry, with a blonde weather-beaten face. The two decided to pick up the pace, as they wanted to reach cover before nightfall.<p>

Iolaus scratched his head. "Why do we have to do this?" he said in a slightly peeved tone.

Hercules sighed, and looked at him. "Because my brother asked me to. Do you realise how long it's been since we were close enough for him to ask me anything? Please, let's just do it."

Iolaus grumbled, "I hope it's worth it."

Hercules grinned. "It will be. King Doradus and Iphicles want this warlord stopped, and when we succeed it will finally bring the two

kingdoms to peace."

Iolaus said hopefully, "Then afterwards we can get that fishing holiday?"

Hercules laughed. "I promise. But first things first."

Iolaus said, "Right. So, where are we headed?"

Hercules replied, "Amphion."

* * *

><p>There are prisons, and there are prisons. Maramis was one of the worst in the country, and the only thing that could beat it in an ugliness contest was the nature of its inmates. Prisoners in tattered rags mumbled, stumbled and occasionally pushed against each other, the dark and smelly dungeons were so crowded. All except for one, in a section at the back. A single man sat alone in a large space. The other prisoners glanced fearfully in his direction but no one dared approach him. Even the guards treated him with caution.<p>

Suddenly everything and everyone stopped. There was complete stillness and silence. The man looked up in surprise. His features were the mirror image of Joxer's, but his nature was as different as his name, which was Jett.

Ares appeared, with the usual dazzle of light. He looked at the prisoner and laughed. "My, how the mighty have fallen," he mocked.

Jett looked at him disinterestedly. "What do you want?"

Ares was amused. "What, not even a hello?"

Jett sounded bored. "Hello. Say what you have to, and then why don't you just beat it."

Ares laughed. "That's no way to speak to me, after everything I've done for you and your family."

This made Jett angry. "Done for me? Look at where I am. Done for my family? Father imprisoned like me, mother dead, my brother Jace in an asylum, and my brother Joxer vanished. He used to write to me all the time, it was the one bright thing in my life, but now nothing. So say your piece then get lost."

Ares laughed again. "Like I've said before, your family serves me, everyone in their own way. Even your idiot brother Joxer."

Jett lunged at him, but before he got anywhere near the god Ares waved a hand as if brushing away a fly. Jett flew back and hit the wall, and collapsed onto the floor. Ares advanced to him, no longer amused. "When I talk, you listen. I came to tell you about Joxer, actually. He's now one of Aphrodite's priests, in Amphion. I don't like it when another god takes one of mine. Fool that he is, his heart is still that of a warrior, like all the men in your family, so technically he belongs to me. I want you to go there and bring him back into the fold."

Jett looked at him. "Why should I?"

Ares shrugged. "Because if you don't, he'll be slaughtered with all the rest when the warlord Krongenes invades Amphion."

Jett had begun to look nervous. "How do I do that, stuck in here?"

Ares looked annoyed. "Do I have to do everything for you? Kill a few guards and escape." He vanished, and people started moving again, the normal sounds of the prison filled the air. Jett didn't notice, he was deep in thought. Finally he nodded to himself, and looked around thoughtfully.

* * *

><p>Some days previously on the outskirts of Amphion, Aphrodite's temple was looking magnificent in the morning sun. On the inside, Joxer lay kneeling before the altar in a brown cassock praying with his eyes closed. A young boy came into the room, but stayed at the back as if uncertain whether to go on. Joxer opened his eyes, having heard the movement, and got up to face the visitor.<p>

"Hello my young friend," he said in a gentle voice. "What can I do for you?"

The boy looked embarrassed. "Hello, Father."

Joxer smiled. "You have something you want to tell me, but you're afraid of the consequences."

The boy's mouth fell open. "Uh, how did you know?" he stammered.

Joxer grinned. "I may not remember my own childhood, but I don't think kids change a lot over time. It's pretty obvious you have something serious to tell me."

The boy looked down, unable to look Joxer in the eyes. "The thing is...before you arrived, a whole bunch of us came here one day and really wrecked the place. It was the cool thing to do, y'know? But now, I feel really bad about it. I mean, you've helped my family so much, and the other kids too. I don't - I mean-

Joxer looked at him compassionately. "You want to make up for it. All right, for the next week you'll be making up for it by doing all the dirty work around here. Anything that needs to be done you do it, understand?" The boy nodded, still looking down. "All right then, off you go. Start in the kitchen. And I just wanted to say-" Joxer paused. "I guess it's a big thing you just did. Not many kids would have the guts to do it. I think you'll work out just fine."

The boy looked up in surprise. He smiled. "Thank you, Father." He turned and raced off.

Suddenly Aphrodite appeared, and smiled at Joxer. "Hello sugar pie."

Joxer turned, with a huge smile himself. "Greetings, my goddess." He got down on one knee before her.

Aphrodite gestured. "Oh get up. I wish you'd quit doing that, didn't anyone ever tell you that it stunts your growth?"

Joxer got up, but still looked happy. "I wouldn't know. I don't remember either way."

Aphrodite shrugged. "Oh yeah, almost forgot about your amnesia. Still can't remember anything, huh?"

Joxer also shrugged. "Not really. But in my dreams..."

Aphrodite looked interested. "What?"

Joxer was thoughtful. "There were two women, a blonde and brunette. I mean, I didn't see any faces, but I had the strangest feeling..."

Aphrodite interrupted him. The last thing she wanted was for him to remember THEM. "Never mind, forget it. Take it from me, most gals only want guys for one thing."

Joxer was full of child-like curiosity. "What's that?"

Aphrodite grinned wickedly. "I'll have to show you some time. It'll be fun."

Joxer bowed his head. "As my goddess commands."

Aphrodite gestured again impatiently, "Oh, knock it off bud. Listen, the reason I came here today was to warn you that a warlord is on the way. I need you to make sure my temple will be okay."

Joxer nodded. "I'll put the guards on alert, and tell the townspeople what's happening. I think some of my friends will help us. Maybe it'll be safest to gather the children here, I was going into town about them today anyway."

Aphrodite was curious. "I didn't know you liked kids."

Joxer had a calm smile. "I enjoy playing the lyre to them. Did you know about the talent I discovered?" Aphrodite shook her head no. "I was passing the local school, and broke up a fight. It was over a lyre, of all the crazy things. I mean, I felt so strange picking it up. Before I knew it, I was playing and singing. They all looked at me speechless. One of the teachers came out and sent the kids back inside. We talked, and he told me I had real talent, I must have been a famous musician. I told him no, I was your priest. He went all polite, so I just left." Joxer shrugged. "I must have been thinking of becoming a musician once, before I entered your service. It's too bad I can't remember."

Aphrodite looked at him. Suddenly she hugged him, then moved away quickly.

Joxer was surprised. "What was that for?"

Aphrodite turned away. "Just because. You be careful you hear? I don't want to have to train someone to take your place, it'd be a real bummer." She vanished in a swirl of light.

Joxer shrugged again, and then moved off to carry out his orders.

* * *

><p>In a village tavern far away, Jett was sitting at a table alone with a foul-looking drink. Autolycus the King of Thieves came in, spying Jett, and thinking it was Joxer came over and sat down with a smile. "Joxer, it's been a long time..."<p>

Jett turned and looked at him. His eyes widened, and an expression of fury came to his face. "You!" he hissed.

Autolycus realised too late that this was Jett. Face pale, he tried to get up and leave. "Uh, sorry to bother you, my mistake..."

Jett lashed out a hand, catching him by the shirt and pulled him back down. A moment later Autolycus had a knife to his throat. "Don't move."

Autolycus cleared his throat. "I wouldn't think of it."

Jett started looking around. "What are you doing here? I ought to kill you right now."

Autolycus tried to remain calm, but it wasn't easy. "Uh, let's not be hasty here. Hey, I wasn't looking for trouble, you know. I'm just passing through on my way to Amphion, there's this magnificent..."

Jett interrupted harshly, "Why there? What's your interest in this?"

Autolycus stared at him in genuine puzzlement. "What do you mean? Is something gonna happen there?"

Jett looked at him, then abruptly let him go, almost throwing him back into his seat. "Get out of here," he said. "If I see you again I'll kill you."

Autolycus decided to back off. "Okay, okay. Touch-ee. By the way, when did you get out? I didn't know they'd released you."

Jett replied staring at his drink, "They didn't. You could say Ares did. All I had to do was kill a few guards."

Autolycus went pale again. "Ares? I don't want to know. In fact, please forget you ever saw me. I thought you were Joxer anyway. Where is he, do you know? Gabrielle and Xena haven't seen him either--"

Jett slammed his fist down. He hissed, "Don't talk to me about my brother. Don't talk to me about those two women, that I will personally send to Tartarus! Just go!"

Autolycus gestured nervously and got up. "All right, I'm going. See you around."

Jett didn't look as Autolycus left, deep in thought about his brother.

* * *

><p>In the town of Amphion, Joxer was walking with the local head of the city council, discussing the upcoming invasion. "That's my idea then. What do you think?"<p>

Councillor Gharlus sighed, and said, "It's probably the best we can do. Since Aphrodite has warned us of the warlord's coming, I've sent for help, which should arrive soon. But it's possible they'll get here too late, and your plan is the best I've heard." He smiled at the younger man. "You know, I wish you'd leave the priesthood and come work for me. Look at what you've done with the temple in a few months - no more desecrations, many more priests, helping the needy..."

Joxer smiled, and shook his head. "No. I belong to Aphrodite, you know that."

Gharlus returned the smile. "Okay. Look, the children are arriving over there, you take them to the temple. Hey, we're in luck," he pointed, "here come two of the warriors I've been expecting."

Joxer said, "Good, I'm off then. And Gharlus - if worst comes to worst, I'll see you in Tartarus."

Gharlus laughed, and said goodbye as Joxer left. He approached Xena and Gabrielle, who walked up to him.

Xena clasped arms with him and said, "Hello Gharlus. I see preparations have begun."

Gharlus replied, "Yes, luckily we had some time to prepare. Father received a warning from Aphrodite, and passed it on."

Gabrielle frowned. "Aphrodite? And who's this `Father'?"

Gharlus smiled. "He's the head priest now at Aphrodite's temple, just outside town. Fine fellow, wish we had more like him. In fact he's somewhere around here, helping move the children to the temple for their safety."

Xena said. "Good idea. What's with the name though, `Father'?"

Gharlus replied, "When he first came to us a few months ago, he couldn't remember anything. Said that luckily Aphrodite found him and told him who he was. The name is something she gave him, and that's what everyone - especially the children - call him."

Gabrielle quickly asked, "Where can we find him? I'd like to ask some questions."

Gharlus said, "He'll probably be back at the temple soon. Xena, please come with me, we need help in organising the militia."

Xena replied, "Okay, uh, just give me a minute to talk to Gabrielle."

After Gharlus had left, Xena turned and asked, "Why all the interest

in Aphrodite's priest?"

Gabrielle replied, "Xena, I think there's something funny going on. Aphrodite sends a priest here, and then a warlord just happens to show up? He could be a spy."

Xena looked at her thoughtfully. "It's possible. Are you sure you're not being a little paranoid though? I know you and Aphrodite aren't exactly on the best of terms..."

Gabrielle cut her off. "That has nothing to do with it. I just want to make sure we're not dealing with an enemy from within, that's all."

Xena sighed. "Okay. Go find this `Father'. I'll join you at the temple soon."

* * *

><p>Gabrielle found the temple easily, and as she entered she saw brown-robed priests rushing about everywhere. She stopped one and asked, "Where can I find the guy calling himself `Father'?"<p>

The priest replied, "I'm not sure, but I saw him not long ago. He was with the children."

Gabrielle thanked him, and started to wander among the crowd. She heard music, and went to investigate. She arrived at a doorway, just as the music ended. Peeking through the curtain, she saw many children huddled and clapping around one of the priests.

"Please, thank you, but that's enough," he said. "I have to get back to my duties." The children groaned, and asked him to stay. "No, I can't," he replied, "there's too much to do, maybe later. Now I want you all to practice the reading and writing, QUIETLY. Someone will be coming to check up on you soon."

The priest started moving to the door. As he stepped out, Gabrielle decided to confront him head-on. "Excuse me, I'm looking for...JOXER!"

Joxer looked puzzled. "Who? Who are you?"

Gabrielle paid no attention. "Joxer, just WHAT are you doing masquerading as a priest? Of all the scatterbrained ideas! Is this where you've been for six months? Come on, let's get you out of that costume, if they catch you you'll be in real trouble!"

Joxer looked at her in confusion, wondering if she was mad. "Are you feeling all right? If you come with me I can..."

Gabrielle was exasperated, and pulled his nose out of habit. "Joxer, come on!"

However, Joxer didn't react as she expected. He grabbed her wrist hard, and twisted it, causing her to yelp and let go. He said sternly, "Young lady, your manners leave a lot to be desired. Please don't do that again."

Gabrielle was stunned. "What-?" Then she pulled herself together.

"Look, we don't have time for this. I'm looking for someone named `Father', have you seen him? He could be a spy."

Joxer's expression became dark and angry. "I am Father, and I'm not a spy. If you want to pray to Aphrodite for our upcoming safety you're welcome to do so in the public area, or else..."

Gabrielle interrupted him. "Pray to Aphrodite? What is wrong with you, Joxer? After everything that's happened because of her meddling, I wouldn't..."

Joxer, furious by now, cut her off. "I will not hear these words in my goddess's own temple! Petrides!" A young acolyte rushed over. "This woman was just leaving. Escort her please to the door." With that he quickly moved off.

Petrides said, "After you."

Gabrielle turned to him, and quickly said, "Look, my friend there is obviously confused. Could you just tell me please where I could find this priest called `Father'? It's very important-"

Petrides interrupted her. "Our brother priest `Father' just now told me to escort you out, and that's what I'm going to do."

Gabrielle was shocked. "What? But-"

Petrides took her arm and walked her out in total confusion.

* * *

><p>Outside the temple, Gabrielle was still shocked, and walking on autopilot. Xena came up on Argo, and dismounted. With concern on her face, she asked her blonde companion, "Are you all right?"<p>

Gabrielle looked at her. "I - I'm not sure yet. You'll never believe this. This `Father' we've been hearing about, it's Joxer!"

Xena was stunned. "JOXER! Here?"

Gabrielle replied, "Yes. And he was acting so weird Xena, it was like he didn't recognise me. He actually threw me out of there! I don't know what he's up to, but it's crazy!"

Xena looked thoughtful. "Wait a minute. Don't you remember what Gharlus said? He may really not remember us. Why did you get thrown out anyway, what did you do?"

Gabrielle looked defensive. "Nothing. Well, I pulled his nose, but it's not like it's the first time. Then when he was going on about Aphrodite and praying and whatever, I might have said-"

Xena wryly interrupted, "Gabrielle, I get the idea. Look, you stay here. I have to go in there anyway, Gharlus wanted me to relay a message. I'll check out the situation, and we'll decide what to do later. Okay?"

Gabrielle replied, "Okay. Don't be too long though, we've still got that warlord to deal with."

Xena smiled. "I know. Take care of Argo, I shouldn't be long." She turned and headed to the temple.

* * *

><p>Xena entered the premises, and saw the rushing people. She soon found Joxer, and went up to him. "Are you the one called `Father'?"<p>

Joxer said, "Yeah, that's me. Who are you?"

Xena hesitated a moment, considering her options. "My name is Xena. Gharlus sent me with a message regarding the defense plans." She handed him a bound scroll.

Joxer unrolled it, read it and frowned. He caught a passing priest, and said, "Assemble all the brothers together as soon as possible. There's urgent news." The priest nodded and left. Joxer turned to Xena and said, "Excuse me, but I've got a lot to do. Thanks for the message, please tell Gharlus we'll do what we can..."

Xena interrupted him. "Could I speak with you privately?"

Joxer considered that and nodded. "All right, but it'll have to be quick." He pulled her to a nearby wall. "What do you want to know?"

For a moment Xena looked uncertain. "I need to know about your amnesia. How far back do you remember?"

Joxer was surprised. "What? I don't have time-"

Xena said, "Please."

Joxer sighed. "Okay. Months ago Aphrodite saved me when I was lost and alone. I can't remember anything about my life before that, except what she's told me. Anyway since then, I've found my place in this world, here in the temple." He smiled. "I'm happy here, with my brothers and the children. Sometimes, I wonder about things before...but as a matter of fact, those occasions are becoming more and more rare, to be honest with you." He shrugged. "I don't think it really matters any more, at least not to me."

Xena thought quickly. "There was someone here before to see you, her name was Gabrielle-"

Joxer interrupted her. "Do you mean the blonde woman? May Aphrodite forgive me, but she's the first person I've ever met that I truly can't stand."

Xena was shocked. Joxer, the old Joxer anyway, had LOVED Gabrielle. Now he couldn't stand her? This was too weird. "What?" she choked out.

Joxer couldn't help noticing. "I'm sorry, is she a friend of yours? Her manners were - never mind, I don't have time for this now. Excuse me, but I've got to go." He rushed off, leaving Xena to slowly exit the temple.

* * *

><p>Outside the temple, Gabrielle rushed up to Xena. "Well? Did you talk to him?"<p>

Xena nodded. "Yes. He truly doesn't remember us. He thinks Aphrodite saved him - who knows, it might even be true. At any rate, he really is a priest here."

Gabrielle was shocked all over again. "I've got to go talk to him. He doesn't-"

Xena interrupted. "I don't think that's a good idea."

Gabrielle was puzzled. "Why not?"

Xena tried to explain. "A couple of reasons. One, he doesn't have the time right now, he's busy organising his people for the defense of the temple. Two, I don't think he'll believe or listen to anything you say, just on general principles."

Gabrielle asked, "Why's that?"

Xena tried to sound as sympathetic as she could, but there was no easy way to say it. "Gabrielle, he doesn't like you. I mean, he REALLY doesn't like you."

Gabrielle couldn't believe it. "He doesn't like me? That's ridiculous! I mean, he could have killed me that time with Callisto, and he sold his father's prize scabbard for me, and a million other things he's done, so why would he now?"

Xena tried to explain. "Gabrielle, that man in there is NOT Joxer. At least not the Joxer we know. He's Aphrodite's priest now, a man who calls himself 'Father'. It's ironic," she said musingly, "but he seems a much stronger man now than he ever was before with us. I mean, I didn't see him trip or stumble once. Accident or not, this might have been the best thing that could have happened to him."

Gabrielle looked horrified, unable to believe Xena had actually said what she did. "How can you say that? He doesn't know who he is, and Aphrodite is manipulating him to be her slave!"

Xena disagreed. "I don't think so. That man serves Aphrodite only because he wants to, I've seen enough slaves to know the difference. I agree that we should tell him the truth, he deserves that much, but I don't think we should try to cause too much of an upheaval in his life. After we deal with this warlord, that is. Come on!" She mounted Argo, and swinging Gabrielle on, rushed off back to the town.

* * *

><p>A short time later in the city centre of Amphion, Hercules and Iolaus saw Xena and Gabrielle in the distance as they were walking along. Waving, the four met as Gabrielle hugged them both and Xena clasped arms with the two men.<p>

Gabrielle exclaimed, "It's so good to see you, we weren't expecting you to be here!"

Xena added, "I'm glad you're here though."

Hercules replied, "So are we."

Iolaus felt he had to say something. "Now that we're all together that warlord won't stand a chance!"

All four laughed at this. All of a sudden a crashing sound was heard, people screamed and scattered, and a group of soldiers came through the streets. Their leader shouted, "By command of Krongenes, you are ordered to surrender before our army! Do as we say and we will spare your lives!"

Xena shouted back, "Really? Why don't you tell Krongenes to shove it up his rear?"

The commander gestured angrily. "KILL THEM!"

Roaring, the soldiers rushed at the four, and a huge fight started. Gabrielle fought with her staff, knocking soldiers over left and right. Xena fought with her sword, and occasionally used her chakram to kill a few of them. Iolaus also used his sword, and used various martial arts techniques to defeat his opponents. Hercules alone used no weapon; with his mighty strength he simply used his fists and feet, often knocking his enemies fifty feet away into the air.

Eventually the remaining soldiers turned away, and stumbled out of town. Gabrielle yelled after them, "And don't come back unless you want more!"

Hercules looked around, and shook his head. "Something's wrong. That was too easy."

Iolaus was amazed. "Too easy?"

Xena nodded. "He's right. It's almost as though they didn't want to win. The real battle is yet to come."

* * *

><p>An hour later in Warlord Krongenes's camp, a row of beaten-looking soldiers stood before their master. The commander of the ill-fated expedition was trying to explain what had happened. "There was nothing we could do. We needed more soldiers to win, so we had to make a strategic withdrawal."<p>

When Krongenes heard that, he grew furious. He backhanded his man viciously. "Get out of my sight, all of you!" Needless to say, that was exactly what they did.

Ares suddenly appeared in a blaze of light. Laughing, he said, "Good help is so hard to find nowadays."

Krongenes turned to face him. "Ares, what are you doing here?"

Ares was suddenly angry. "Oh, this is just a social call, what do you think?"

Krongenes gulped, afraid for his life. "What - what do you want me to do?"

Ares snarled, "Next time, follow the plan. You were supposed to grab the little blonde, and where is she?"

Krongenes replied, "We'll get her, although I don't think--"

Ares interrupted him. "Who told you to think? You don't have the brains to do that! You do what I tell you, that's what you do!"

Krongenes said submissively, "Yes, Ares."

Ares grew calm. "Right, now here's what needs to be done. You've got to bring Aphrodite's priest and the blonde here, but QUIETLY. No one must see you bring her, but him I don't care what you have to do. Later when I give you the signal, she dies."

Krongenes asked, "What about the priest?"

Ares gestured dismissively. "It doesn't matter, do what you want. The fool will probably get himself killed anyway."

"Yes, Ares." After Ares vanished, Krongenes strode away to gather his men quickly together.

* * *

><p>A short time later in the countryside outside Amphion, Gabrielle was making her way to the temple when all of a sudden Krongenes's soldiers appeared all around her. She got knocked out from behind and fell unconscious. "Bring her!" snarled the leader, as they moved off.<p>

Later still at Aphrodite's temple, the doors burst open and the soldiers poured in. Another fight took place, but this one was very short as the defenders were no match for their attackers. During the frenzy Joxer was hit across the head, and fell to the ground. "Hurry!" shouted the leader, and they moved him out and away as they retreated.

* * *

><p>At the same time, Xena, Hercules and Iolaus were patrolling the city battlements, waiting for Krongenes to attack. Xena said, "I don't like this. They should have attacked us by now."<p>

Hercules agreed, "I know. What are they waiting for?"

Iolaus mused, "Something...or maybe someone?"

Xena looked around suddenly. "Where's Gabrielle?"

Hercules and Iolaus looked at each other. "Don't know...", "Haven't seen her for a while...", they said.

Xena grabbed a passing militiaman. "Have you seen my friend Gabrielle?"

The soldier nodded. "I saw her heading towards the temple not long ago."

Xena let him move off and swore, "Damn it! I told her to forget about Joxer till afterward!"

Iolaus looked surprised. "Joxer? What's he got to do with this?"

Xena looked pained. "It's a long story. Basically, he's a priest at Aphrodite's temple now, and I think Gabrielle went to try to jog his memory."

Hercules was amazed. "Whoa - he became a priest for my little sister?"

Xena grimaced. "Like I said, long story. I think I better go find her. Wait a minute!" she stopped. "Do you think that's why the attack hasn't come yet? That this was a trick just to get HER?"

Just then a priest stumbled into town, clothing torn and bloody. A crowd gathered around him, clamouring for news. Xena, Hercules and Iolaus hurried over and Xena asked, "What happened?"

The priest gasped, "They attacked our temple. But they left almost at once, and they kidnapped Father."

Iolaus asked, "`Father'?"

Xena said hurriedly, "That's what Joxer's calling himself nowadays. So they took him - probably Gabrielle too. I really don't like the looks of this, it has TRAP painted all over it. Well, we haven't got any choice, we've got to go after them."

The priest gurgled, "They can show you at the temple which direction they went."

Hercules bent over. "Thank you. You get some rest, we'll get help for you and your people."

* * *

><p>At Warlord Krongenes's camp, the main tent had been set up as a prison. Gabrielle and Joxer were tied up against two poles in the centre of the room, facing each other. Joxer was still unconscious.<p>

Gabrielle shouted, "Joxer! Joxer, wake up!"

Joxer struggled awake. "What - where am I?"

Gabrielle replied, "We've been captured by Krongenes's army. We've got to get out of here. Can you move?"

Joxer struggled to loosen his ropes, but failed. "No. They've tied me up pretty well. Hey wait a minute," he said, "don't I know you?"

Gabrielle said, "Of course you do, that's what I've been trying to tell you all along!"

Joxer nodded to himself. "Yeah, now I remember. You're that rude woman who came to the temple-"

Gabrielle became annoyed. "Joxer, this is not the time...!"

Joxer jerked his head up. "What did you call me?"

Gabrielle didn't know what to say. "Uh..."

Joxer said looking at her, "Joxer. That was my name, was it? From before, I mean."

Gabrielle by now was very flustered and unsure. "Look, this isn't the right time - later, once we're out of here-"

Joxer interrupted her. "There may not BE a later, you know. Still, if they just wanted to kill us, they could have done it before this. My guess is they must want hostages or slaves." He shrugged. "Too bad I'm no use as either."

Gabrielle looked at him in amazement. "You really have changed. You weren't like this, um, you know..."

Joxer stared back at her. "You mean, when I was Jerkster?"

Gabrielle corrected him, "That's JOXER."

Joxer shrugged again. "Whatever. Hey, I'm curious. What was I like before?"

Gabrielle was uncertain what to say. "Well, you-"

Joxer cut her off. "You don't need to say it, you thought I was an idiot. From what I've heard, you may be right."

Gabrielle was shocked. "How did-"

Joxer laughed. "I remember what you said and did back at the temple. It's not exactly the sort of thing you'd do with someone you respect, now, is it?"

Gabrielle was now really, really embarrassed. "Look, I'm sorry about that. I thought you were...well you know, just getting yourself into trouble. I didn't mean anything by it. As a matter of fact, I was coming back to find you when they got me, I was going to try to help you remember. I just want the old annoying Joxer back, that's all."

Joxer was puzzled. "Why? It sounds like you didn't like him or respect him."

Gabrielle squirmed. "Yeah well, it's not that simple. Despite everything, he means a lot to me and Xena..."

Joxer looked at her thoughtfully. "Maybe I misjudged you. Hold it," he said snapping his head around, "someone's coming."

The tent flap swung open, and Krongenes swaggered in. "Well, what have we here? Two fine lambs for the slaughter!" he roared with

laughter.

Joxer looked unimpressed. "What do you want with us? Apart from the twisted pleasures your kind enjoys, of course."

Krongenes stopped laughing. With a snarl, he approached Joxer and backhanded him savagely. "I hate priests, you know. All priests. My own father was one of you. I took great pleasure in killing him when he tried to stop one of my battles." He drew his sword.

Gabrielle tried to distract him. "Hey! You still haven't answered his question. What are you going to do with us?"

Krongenes sneered. "You're my hostages, of course. If the city doesn't surrender by sundown, I'll send them your hands and ears."

Joxer pleaded with him. "No! Do what you want with me, but please let her go."

Krongenes hit him again. "Shut up! I'll be back to deal with you later." He gagged both of them and with a look of satisfaction on his face, he left.

* * *

><p>A few moments later, Jett stealthily came into the tent. Both Joxer's and Gabrielle's eyes went wide. Jett went to Joxer, ungagged him and started to work at untying him.<p>

Joxer coughed, "Thanks. You're my brother, right? I mean, we look so much alike."

Jett stopped, and looked at him in confusion. "Joxer, what are you talking about?"

Joxer looked embarrassed, and said, "Ah, it's complicated. I'll explain the details later, but basically I don't remember anything about my life before a few months ago. By the way, what's your name?"

Jett stared, then started working on the ropes again. "It's Jett."

Joxer said, "Nice name." At this point, the ropes came off, and Joxer was free. "Ah, thanks. C'mon, let's untie her and get out of here."

Jett looked at Gabrielle and sneered. "I say we just leave her here."

Joxer was shocked at this. "We can't do that! They'll kill her. And besides, her friend won't be pleased when I tell her what happened."

Jett snorted, but ungagged her and untied her ropes. Gabrielle didn't look at him, and simply said, "Thanks."

Jett didn't say anything. Watching this, Joxer exclaimed "What is with you two? You act like you want to kill each other!"

Jett looked confused, and amazingly turned to Gabrielle. She shrugged. "Like he said, he doesn't remember you, me or anything else. Look, let's just get out of here, okay?"

Jett said threateningly, "You're lucky he likes you. I had a lot of time in Maramis to fantasise what I'd do to you and Xena if I ever got the chance."

Joxer cut in before a fight started. "Enough. Like she said, let's go!"

* * *

><p>A short time later in the countryside woods, Jett, Joxer and Gabrielle were hurrying back to Amphion. Joxer asked, "Jett, tell me about our family."<p>

Jett looked at him and replied, "What do you want to know?"

Joxer said, "Well, what about our parents? Do we have any other brothers or sisters?"

Joxer glanced quickly at Gabrielle. "I'll tell you about Jace some other time. Our parents aren't around any more."

Joxer was confused. "They're dead?"

Jett reluctantly added, "Mother, yes. Dad may as well be, in the prison he's in."

Joxer was concerned now. "Prison?"

Jett didn't want to talk. "I'll tell you about it later, when she's not around."

Suddenly Joxer stopped. "Why do you dislike her so much? What's she done to you?"

Jett was angry now. "She helped send me to prison. She also once said one of you was worth a thousand of me. Who is she to judge?"

Gabrielle was angry too. "At least I'm not a..." she stopped.

Joxer said, "A what?"

Jett sounded resigned. "The word you're looking for is 'assassin', brother."

Joxer was shocked. "Assassin?"

Gabrielle put in, "Jett is known as the King of Assassins, aren't you?"

Jett replied bitterly, "Not any more. I've killed people, I'll admit, but none of them were what you'd call innocent. How about you, you ever killed anyone?"

Gabrielle looked down, and eventually said, "Yes."

Jett looked at her. "And you didn't like it. Well I've got news for you, only the insane like it." He turned around, and looked at Joxer. "Look, I'm not going to lie to you. I was told you were going to be killed, so I came to rescue you. If you don't want me around, I can leave. Right now."

Joxer was still shocked by all these revelations. He didn't know what to say. Then he remembered all the things he had been taught in the priesthood, and a determined expression came on his face. He looked Jett in the eye and said, "No. Look, you saved our lives. I can't say I approve of what you did, but you're still my brother. If there's ever anything I can do for you, all you've got to do is just ask."

For the first time, Jett smiled. "Maybe later."

* * *

><p>All of a sudden soldiers came rushing out of the trees, and attacked them with loud battle cries. Jett and Gabrielle fought to defend themselves, with sword, staff and anything they could get their hands on. Joxer picked up a sword as well, and clumsily tried to ward off his attackers.<p>

Eventually, with all his soldiers lying dead or unconscious, Krongenes tried to kill Gabrielle. Blindsided, she didn't see the attack coming. Joxer saw what he was going to do though, and threw himself in the way. He only just managed to get there on time, and the knife plunged into his side.

"No!" screamed Gabrielle.

Jett turned, and saw Joxer bleeding to death. His expression became cold and ugly. He grabbed his sword and started crashing away at Krongenes. The warlord defended himself, and eventually had Jett pinned down and ready to plunge the sword through his body. All of a sudden, a grappling hook came out of nowhere and snatched his sword away. Jett took advantage of his confusion, knocking Krongenes aside. He then proceeded to beat him senseless, with an evil look on his face.

Autolycus dropped out of the trees, and said "Enough. He's out cold, you can cripple him later."

Jett snarled wordlessly at him, and went over to examine Joxer. Gabrielle had been trying to stop the bleeding, and there were bloodstains all over her. He barked, "How is he? How bad is it?"

Gabrielle shook her head. "It's not good. We have to get him to a healer fast."

Just then Xena, Hercules and Iolaus showed up. Xena looked around, "Looks like there was quite a battle here. I wonder who won?"

Gabrielle looked up. "Xena!" she called. The warrior princess hurried over, but stopped when she saw Jett. He growled at her, but didn't say anything. Xena moved around him and started to examine her

patient. "What happened here?"

Autolycus started, "Well, there I was minding my own business--"

Gabrielle interrupted him. "Autolycus saved Jett's life, and Joxer saved mine. He took the knife thrust meant for me."

Xena stood up, and Gabrielle knelt to help him. Xena said, "He's bleeding badly on the inside. If we move him he'll die, but if we don't he'll die later. We need the town healer here."

Hercules looked at her. "By the time he gets here..."

Iolaus completed the unspoken sentence. "It'll be too late."

* * *

><p>Ares appeared with his usual swirl of light. He looked absolutely disgusted. "What a complete and total screw-up!"<p>

Xena turned to him and snapped, "What do you want?"

Ares was really angry. "Maybe just a chance to blow off some steam. That idiot Joxer, he's ruined everything. If he had just done what I told him--!"

Hercules said, "What are you talking about, Ares?"

Ares didn't reply. Jett got up and walked across to the god. In a low and dangerous voice he said, "I think I know. This whole thing was a set-up, wasn't it?"

Autolycus said, "Huh?"

Jett was furious. "Ares came to me in prison, told me that Joxer was in danger. He knew I'd escape, that I'd come to rescue him. He told Krongenes to be here to ambush us. What I don't understand is why? What did you hope to gain by our deaths?"

Gabrielle got up. "Wait a minute. Krongenes wanted to kill ME, not Joxer. That was your plan, right? Once I was gone, you'd have every opportunity to work on Xena and turn her back into your evil warlord. Am I wrong?"

Ares snarled, "It would have worked too, if that fool had taken up my offer. All he had to do was pretend to be a priest and come rescue you! He dared refuse! And then he got in Krongenes's way! I should have killed him when I had the chance, not just taken away his memory!"

Xena was disgusted. "Ares, this is sick, even for you. And it was all for nothing anyway. I'm never again going to be what you want me to be, never! Get out of here!"

Ares disappeared. Moments later, Joxer gave out a strangled gasp, then lay still. Gabrielle and Jett rushed to examine him. Xena did too, then slowly shook her head and covered him up. "I'm sorry," she said brokenly, "he's gone."

Gabrielle burst out crying. "This shouldn't have happened! It should be me lying there, not him!"

Iolaus came over to try to comfort her. "I'm sorry, Gabrielle. I know you cared about him, we all did. He's in the Elysian fields now. If it's any comfort, I'm sure he'll be joining you there again some day. Come on, let's get you back to Amphion and checked by the healers, you don't look so good."

Hercules was standing close to Xena and asked her, "Are you going to be all right?"

Xena looked at him and replied, "I'm just worried about her. I don't know how badly she'll take this, after everything else that's happened in her life."

At the same time, Jett went up to Autolycus and said grudgingly, "Thanks for saving my life."

Autolycus replied, "Eh, think nothing of it, I was in the neighborhood. Besides you could have killed me in that tavern after what happened between us last time, but you didn't. Let's just say we're even."

* * *

><p>Suddenly a sparkle of light appeared, and Aphrodite showed up. She looked sadly at Joxer. "Oh my, studmuffin, what a mess you've gotten into. I told you to watch yourself!"<p>

Gabrielle tried to grab her, but was restrained by Xena. "This is as much YOUR fault as it is that of Ares!" she screamed. "If you hadn't tricked him into becoming your slave..."

Aphrodite cut her off. "Hey, back off babe. No one forced him to do anything. He chose all of this, from the moment I found him after Ares did the big zap on his tokus. That's the only reason Daddy let me have this special dispensation!"

Hercules looked at her. "What do you mean?"

Aphrodite replied, "Come on bro, get with it! The Fates complaining it wasn't his time, Hades bitching about the overcrowding down there, Daddy hears about it all and sends me to clean up the mess! What a major downer. Oh, well, just a moment-"

She leaned over and spread her hands over Joxer's corpse. Blinding rainbow light flashed everywhere. When it was over, Joxer was sitting up and looking confused.

Gabrielle yelled, "Joxer!" and hugged him fiercely. "You're alive!"

Joxer thought about that in confusion, and looked at himself. "I seem to be," he agreed.

Xena looked at Aphrodite. "Thank you."

Aphrodite gestured. "Don't mention it. Just because I have to lose one of the best priests I ever had..." She disappeared.

Joxer looked around. "What's going on?"

Iolaus said to him, "Joxer, what's the last thing you remember?"

He tried to answer him. "Ares. Ares? He offered me something, but I said no way, and then...I don't know, I can't remember-"

Xena said, "Does the name `Father' mean anything?"

Joxer said, "No, why?"

Xena replied, "Never mind. Just be glad everything's okay now."

Joxer struggled to get up. He looked at himself and asked, "Why am I wearing this robe? Where's my armour?"

Gabrielle told him. "We'll explain later, it's complicated."

Hercules said, "Iolaus and I will take care of Krongenes, his warlord days are over. Then we've got some serious fishing to do. We'll see you around." The two dragged Krongenes up and left.

Autolycus said, "I'd better be going too. After all, I'm not getting any richer hanging around here." With that, he jumped up into the trees and disappeared.

Jett came up and said, "Hello, brother."

Joxer was astounded. "Jett? When did you get here?"

Jett didn't reply immediately. Eventually he said, "I better get going. I think these two will be able to take better care of you than I would. I'll see you again at home, during winter solstice. You be careful from now on, Joxer." He hugged him, and quickly turned and walked away into the woods.

Joxer turned to look at Xena and Gabrielle. "Am I missing something? What's really going on here?"

Gabrielle sighed, as the three began walking off. "Joxer, your memory isn't exactly what it used to be, you've been through a lot lately..."

****THE END****

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file.